

BAUHAUS LEGACY – INTERVIEW #5

Interviewee Name: Erika Pfammatter

Interviewer Name: Christopher Brown

Interview Date: 12/6/2025

Interview Location: Gropius House, 68 Baker Bridge Rd, Lincoln, MA 01773

Christopher Brown:

This is the fifth interview of the Bauhaus Legacy series. It is December 6th, 2025, and we are here at the Walter Gropius house in Lincoln, Massachusetts at 68 Baker Bridge Road. So, we're going to begin with an introduction. What is your name?

Erika Pfammatter:

Erika Pfammatter.

CB:

And what is your relation to Walter Gropius?

EP:

I'm his granddaughter.

CB:

And what is or was your profession?

EP:

I was a classical musician, mostly retired now.

CB:

Okay. And what did you play?

EP:

I played piano and harp, but I mostly earned a living as a teacher, both in schools and privately.

CB:

Did you perform professionally as well?

EP:

I performed professionally, primarily on the harp, but also conducting choruses and somewhat piano, yes.

CB:

Okay. So, your focus is classical music?

EP:

Oh, definitely. Classical musician.

CB:

When were you born and where did you grow up?

EP:

I was born in New York City in January of 1960, and I grew up in Brooklyn Heights until I went to college. And then I came back and lived in Brooklyn Heights for another two years, then went to graduate school, and then I did not come back to New York City.

CB:

Okay. And where did you study?

EP:

I studied at Vassar College for my undergraduate and the University of Washington in Seattle for my graduate degree.

CB:

Okay. Did you study music there?

EP:

Oh, yes. Yeah.

CB:

For both degrees?

EP:

My undergraduate degree is in music and my graduate degree is in choral conducting.

CB:

Okay. When you say music - performance or theory, or...?

EP:

Choral conducting is considered performance.

CB:

Performance.

EP:

Yep.

CB:

And it sounds like you've lived in at least a few places over the years. What different areas have you lived in and where do you live currently?

EP:

I grew up in New York State. I lived in Washington for, obviously while I was attending graduate school. Then I lived in Pennsylvania, then I lived in Michigan, and then I moved to Massachusetts where I currently live out on Cape Cod.

CB:

When did you move to Massachusetts?

EP:

Moved to Massachusetts in 2006 and moved to Waltham, not very far at all from my grandparents' house, which was a great pleasure. I got to see it often.

CB:

And do you have any children?

EP:

I do. I have two grown sons.

CB:

And what drew you to your career path? Have you had a lifelong love of music?

EP:

I have, yes. I was always pretty good at music and at my parents' cocktail parties, because that was what people did in the '50s and '60s and '70s, they had cocktail parties, and I was pressed into service along with my sister to pass trays of things. And everybody, every male that I can even think of that was associated with my parents and grandparents was of course an architect. And there's a lovely, trite old phrase about architecture that it's "frozen music", and every once in a while at these cocktail parties, somebody would look down at me and take notice of me and say, "Oh Erika, and what are you doing dear?" And I would say "I'm in melted architecture," and nobody would ever laugh, ever. [laughs] But no, music was my thing from an early age. Age eight, I begged for a piano and I finally got a beat-up player piano with its viscera eviscerated, all of its player parts removed. And I loved that thing. And that's where I started taking lessons at age eight and never looked back, although I did go to Vassar as an English major, but immediately switched to Music. So, it's a pretty straight line.

CB:

You mentioned your parents. Can you talk a bit about them? What were their names? Where were they from?

EP:

My mother was Walter Gropius's, originally, his niece through his second wife, Ise, and then eventually his adopted daughter. Her name throughout her life was Ati, but her birth name was Beate, which in English we would normally translate as Beatrice. The root is, it's a Latin word that means "blessed". Her birth mother, who was Ise's younger sister, named her Beate because she felt very lucky to have her. But as a young child, she couldn't pronounce her own name - Beate in German, "Beate... Ata... Ata... Ati". And so, she ended up nicknaming herself "Ati". And my father's name was Charles.

CB:

That's Charles Forberg, correct?

EP:

Charles Forberg, correct. Of Swedish extraction. His father was from Sweden.

CB:

How old was your mother when she was adopted by the Gropius family?

EP:

She had just turned 10.

CB:

Okay. And do you know if she was close to them when she was younger as well? Were they close family members?

EP:

They were relatively close, yes. They saw each other quite frequently. Ise Gropius was the eldest of four sisters, and three of them saw each other quite frequently, the oldest three. The youngest one, Renate, known as Rena, had been considerably younger and had been raised by other relatives when their parents died quite young. And I think they saw less of her because she ended up moving to France. But they all kept in touch. But the oldest three were particularly close. Ise was the eldest, then there was Hertha, and then there was Ellen who was an actress. And Hertha was actually the biological mother of Ati who then died when Ati was 10. And then she was adopted by the Gropiuses.

CB:

Okay. And we'll get into more about your mother later, I'd love to learn as much about her as I can since we have you here. But for now, let's go back. So, we're talking about Walter, about Ise, your grandparents, and how much do you know about their family history? I know that's a big question, but their lineage, the Gropius family, the Franks - where they come from, anything notable about their family lines that you'd like to share.

EP:

Well, I know quite a bit. They told me, I mean, my grandfather, I was nine when he died, so I knew him and I remember him very, very well. I was 23 when my grandmother died, so I knew her better, of course, and had more opportunity to talk to her and hear her stories. But obviously, both of them talked

a great deal to my mother, and she passed down a great deal to me. And I was always very, very interested in family history. So, I know quite a bit about their backgrounds, and I've met a lot of relatives, so I'm familiar certainly with their immediate family stories and have met a lot of their relatives. And of course, in my grandfather's case, biographies have been written and hopefully one more is coming. We'll see.

CB:

And where were Walter and Ise both originally from?

EP:

Walter was born, I believe, in Berlin and Ise was born in Hanover.

CB:

And she was a bit younger than him as well?

EP:

Yes, yes. That's a family trait.

CB:

Do you recall any interesting stories about their childhoods that stood out to you?

EP:

About his childhood? [pause] Not particularly about their childhoods.

CB:

Or what type of children they were, or what they were like when they were younger?

EP:

Yeah, I'm trying to think. I know that in Ise's family, there were these four girls, and papa was some sort of land governor or land manager. And sons were the currency of the day, and there were no sons. But the first girl, Ise, was I mean, you've seen pictures of her. I mean, she was a knockout. She was an absolute knockout, especially when she was younger. I mean the nose, the nose, this perfect nose, I mean, my God! And when she was younger, the blonde curls, and she was the first and okay, so she was a girl - the boys were going to come. And she looked very much like her father who was very handsome, and she was the apple of his eye. Then Ellen came along. Ellen was also the apple of his eye, but then just girl, girl, girl, girl. So, I think she had sort of a charmed childhood because she was the first, she was accepted, she was beautiful. It's not really a childhood story, but I think she had a pretty easy time of it. I think the second daughter, not so much, and I think Ise was outgoing and confident and had an easier road of it than some of the other ones did.

My grandfather, I mean you have a question later on about what I would ask him. I would say, "Where did you come from? Where did you come from with your amazing soul and your amazing character?" Because his description of his own father is not particularly flattering, but he was very close to his mother. And I think that his mother was quite remarkable, and he was very close to his sister and loved his younger brother very, very much, who died quite young as you know, and certainly his experience

and his suffering in the First World War. I mean, you probably know what happened to him, and that all shapes a person, but how do you get, I mean, tons of soldiers suffered horribly on all sides of the war and had good relationships with smart, intelligent, sensitive mothers and smart, intelligent, sensitive sisters, and didn't grow up to be that kind of person. So, more than that I wasn't told and don't know, I'm afraid.

CB:

You mentioned he was particularly close to his sister; which sister was that? What was her name?

EP:

Manon, named after the mother. And notice he named his daughter that, his own daughter. So, there were three Manons.

CB:

Right.

EP:

Which is a French name, but they came from French Huguenots, the Scharnweber family. That was the maiden name of his mother.

CB:

Now I know that there were other architects in the Gropius lineage.

EP:

Yes, yes.

CB:

Do you know much about that?

EP:

No, except that it was not the level of architecture that we think of when we think of Gropius in that it was more... they were architects, but if you read his own quotes about his father, as I said, not terribly admiring and a little more sort of workaday like build a, not a barn exactly, but sort of build a municipal building in a very sort of, just get some plans so that something could be built. There were some that were a little bit more imaginative and something more unique, but there was a thread, you're absolutely right, of architecture running back. And there was definitely, his father was an architect.

CB:

Now, you mentioned that he was much closer to his mother and there was some distance with his father. Was it kind of a personality thing or he was cold to him?

EP:

Yeah, it's in one of the biographies of both of them. He sort of describes his father as an architect but describes him also as a somewhat timid and not a bold man. And he was an architect earlier in his life

and then he left architecture and just worked as a municipal servant of some kind. And you can tell in his quote that he sort of faults him for that like, "Come on man, step up. I mean, why did you just leave that and then just go to work as a clerk or something?" But it's in the biographies, and you read between the lines, a slight lack of respect. Don't mean to put words in his mouth, but...

CB:

So, you mentioned Walter's daughter, Manon, who was... this was when he was married to Alma Mahler before he met Ise. Did your family ever talk much about her death and how that affected him?

EP:

No, I know that my mother was curious about it, and I think after my grandfather died, she did talk to Ise about it, but as far as I was aware, during his lifetime, it was not brought up and not mentioned. But this was also, you have to remember, a time when painful things were not... therapy had not really been discovered yet, and painful things were sort of swallowed, and you were expected to kind of pull yourself up and move on. And I imagined he talked to Ise about it, I would think, privately and probably did not want to talk to Ati about it deliberately to make her feel in any way second or less, or "you're not my real daughter" or anything, because he loved my mother dearly. And you probably know how he added that sweet line to his will, such as it stands, "Remember Ati whom I love" - he added this sentence to his very, very short will and did that deliberately.

So, I think he made a point of not talking about it, both because it was probably too painful and because you just didn't, and also not to make Ati feel in any way left out or negated in some way. But I do think that Ati talked to Ise about it because she told me a good bit about Manon and how painful it was for Walla, for my grandfather, that Alma just would not - I mean, all of this is public knowledge and has been written about a great deal - was so jealous and so protective of Manon the daughter and wouldn't let, would cancel visit after visit and just throw obstacle after obstacle up in the way to prevent Walter from getting to see his daughter and... really just tragic. And then when Manon was actually dying, stalled and stalled and stalled until the last possible minute to let him know so that he couldn't get there in time to see her before she died. And just... I hope that woman is in a special place.

CB:

And I know, for any viewers, there's an interesting biography of Walter, Fiona McCarthy's book, and that does get into some of that. It's a very tragic story.

EP:

It really is.

CB:

So, speaking of biographies, any biographies that you may have read, do they ring true to you as far as the man that you knew?

EP:

Yes, yes. I've read Reg Isaacs', of course, and I've read Fiona McCarthy's. I haven't read Reg's in German, two volumes. My German's not up to that task. My mother read it. I read the abridged version in English, and I certainly think he did an excellent job because he knew my grandfather and was devoted to him.

But I do remember Reg right here, right here on that couch, sitting on the floor with his back against that couch because he had terrible back problems and Ise sitting in that chair, the butterfly chair. And Reg was a man of exceptional patience working with Ise, and my grandmother could have an imperious side, shall we say, and Reg working to get information out of her and Ise giving it, but giving it in a certain way that required a certain amount of patience to accept and Reg with his back hurting more and more and more, sitting there on the floor taking notes.

But yes, I mean, Reg certainly was a devotee and did his very, very best to write a careful and accurate and truthful and respectful biography. And Fiona, whom I met before she started writing, and I asked her, I made a specific request to her, which I think she met and succeeded in. I said, "You would do my grandfather a great service if you would try to restore his character in the public eye because there has been character assassination propagated against him that is false and untrue and hurtful and harmful, and that is not who he was and [a] misrepresentation of what he intended and what he meant, and antisemitism and anti-female, and I mean all kinds of horrible things that are not true, and if you can dig in and really find out who the man was and write about that and bring his true character to the fore, that would be a tremendous service".

And I think that she did that. I think she represents that. She was hampered... there are not a few errors in the book because she doesn't speak German - didn't, she's passed away sadly. And so, all of his writing, all his letters and all of his writing that was not in English, she had to have someone else translate for her and his handwriting is notoriously hard to read. So, I think that was an added screen for her that made it difficult. But on the whole, I felt that she represented him as a person quite accurately, the man that I remember.

CB:

So, we talked about biographies of your grandfather and how they represent him, but how would you describe Walter Gropius as a person?

EP:

He was truly, truly one of the most remarkable people that I've ever met. And I say that absolutely not because he was my grandfather, but he was so interested in everybody and everything and continued to be so into old age - curious, and open-minded and especially so with young people, with everybody, but with young people, with children. I mean, anything that my sister and I did, he said, "What are you doing there and how is that going to work? And what are you going to make? And then what happens?" But with real genuine... you could feel it. It wasn't just patronizing. "Oh, that's cute"... that's it. Whereas, I mean, to all her credit, and she had amazing talents and skills, my grandmother had absolutely no interest in what we were doing whatsoever as children, and that was just not where her interest lay. And I've seen other grandparents be adoring with what they... "that's so cute". But he was truly interested in what we were thinking, how we got there.

And one of the neighbors, Mark Allen, who's roughly my age and we're still in touch, he tells a story about when he first met my grandfather, he had a little radio-controlled car and he was out on the road. They had just, I think the Allens had just moved in recently or something. And my grandfather was taking a walk out on the road and he said, "Now, what is that and how does that work?" And this whole long conversation, and there was nothing about him that was the "Starchitect", right? Just always curious about what other people were thinking, what was on their mind, what was going on. I mean, I remember dinner parties and he wouldn't say a word. The entire dinner party would go on, and only if

someone really sought him out and said, "Well Walter, what do you think about this?" And then he might say one or two things. "Well, I thought it was interesting. I thought it was..." But usually, people like to talk about themselves. Someone would jump in and he'd let, I mean, it was never, ever, ever about him. He was modest about himself. He was self-effacing. I mean, yes, he could put on a public persona that sometimes came across as, you know, he learned how to do an interview, he learned how to be serious and whatever. But the personal man at home had a lovely, gentle, wry sense of humor, was extremely kind, was extremely gentle, charming, and so open to the world and so appreciative of everything, endlessly optimistic.

I mean, when you think of how... age 51, well, first he goes to the war, spends two days nearly dying, stuck in rubble, and recovers from that, comes back, starts the [Bauhaus] school, all of that then loses all of that, age 51. I mean... marriage, daughter dies, age 51 goes to England, tries to get that going. That doesn't work. I mean, over and over and over again... love affairs, marriages, children, jobs, all of that. And again and again and again and again, he picks up and redoes it, redoes it. I mean, I wouldn't last through ONE of those. And that's what I would want to ask him is, "Where does this endless drive to keep going [come from]?" It's that curiosity, and "it's not about me... I'm not going to just wallow in my own self-pity" and whatever, because it's not about him. It's about the world, and it's about helping others. It's about finding out what others are doing. And anyway, now I'm babbling, but I really, really just think he was a remarkable and beautiful human being. I mean, this is a fraught word, but noble... noble. I mean, people hurt him. People betrayed him. They betrayed him personally. They betrayed him professionally. They betrayed him financially. And he never retaliated. He always took the high road, and he was able to tolerate conflict in a way that I've never met. I mean, don't all of us run from conflict? "I'm conflict avoidant" - we have a word for it now, you know?

And he was the one at the Bauhaus, I mean, he held it together for nine years because he could do that. And he saw it as a good thing. He understood that healthy conflict produces creativity and imagination, and produces something new, if you can manage it well and support it and not let it deteriorate into negativity. He'd be in his office at the Bauhaus and [Oskar] Schlemmer would come in one door and say, "I can't work with [Wassily] Kandinsky one more day!" you know? [laughs] and just go out and slam the door. And Kandinsky would come in and say, "If I have to see Schlemmer for one more day..." And then Gropius would say, "We need to have a party. We need to have a party, and we need a theme, and it's going to be metal or black and white or red or music or something." And then everyone would pour all their energies into making something together. And Kandinsky would say, "You know, I want to do this, but Schlemmer, how about, okay, how about you help me?" "Fine." And lo and behold, it all comes together. And yeah, I've babbled enough. But I just felt that he was truly a remarkable human being, quite aside from his incredible gifts as an architect, as a teacher, as a coalescer of people and ideas as a collaborator.

And I remember long ago when my sons were little and first sort of introducing them to the idea that your great-grandfather was someone special and he started this special school. And I was trying to find a little story that would kind of demonstrate it for them. And I said, "When he came to this country and he was working at Harvard", and just as an example, "some of his students came to him, Chip Harkness and so on, and said, 'We'd like to start an architectural office and we'd like your guidance; we'd like you to come into it with us'". And my father was an architect, and my stepfather was an architect. My stepbrother is an architect, and most of the men that I knew, my parents' friends growing up were architects. And all of them, without exception, their practices were named after them. Of course. I mean, you go to a plumber, it's called Joe's Plumbing. You want to know who you're going to, right? I mean, it's Chad Smith's electrician service. You want to know where you're going. So, it's John Johansen

Architects, it's Charles Forberg Architects. But they didn't call it, even though by that point he had a name and he had a reputation, and they probably would've gotten a lot of work if they'd called it Walter Gropius and Associates. But they didn't. What did they call it? The Architect's Collaborative. They could have called it Harkness, Fletcher, right on down the line, Thompson, Gropius... They called it The Architect's Collaborative. And he was there as, clearly, someone with decades more experience than the rest of them, but that's what they called it. And he wanted to be a part of that. And he made very clear to them and to everyone else, "I am equal with all of you". And I just think that's beautiful. And that was the story that I told them as an example of, yeah, that was his mindset, was – "You're young, you're fresh, you've got the ideas, let's work on this together as equals".

CB:

And everything you're saying is exactly my impression of him and what I've heard from others, even during these interviews. And I'm wondering, that idea of collaboration, like you said, it was a major component of the Bauhaus, and then we have TAC - The Architect's Collaborative. How did that play out at home? Do you know...

EP:

[laughs]

CB:

...as far as his parenting style or running the house or how... the collaborative nature of running the household?

EP:

Well, you know, of course, because it's in one of the booklets, that he did call Ise "*Die Majorität*" which means "the majority" [laughs]. But he was, in a time when women had a role in the house and the man had a role as the breadwinner and so on, their marriage was very, very equal. And even though, yes, supposedly she was in charge in the house, I mean, he carried dishes out and wiped dishes off. I mean, they were very equal. And I mean, of course, as is part of your tour, I'm sure, the big desk where they worked side by side, and he would've been helpless without her in his work, absolutely lost without her to write and to translate and to support him in all of his teaching and lecturing and all that he did. It's just when it came to decision-making about almost anything to do in the house, and that included, because the house was a museum from day one. It was a museum from day one. And so, anything about, well, "We're going to do this and we're going to need a new curtain here, and we have to do this and we're going to have so-and-so over, the Breuer's are going to come over, and Ben Thompson on Friday"... you know, what she said went. She was the majority. *Die Majorität*. [laughs] And that was his collaboration was to say, "Yeah, Ise. Yeah, this is fine. *Kein Problem, das geht.*" [laughs]

CB:

Well, I was going to ask about her personality as well. My sense is that, again, he was a very strong person, very charismatic, otherwise he couldn't have run the school, for one thing...

EP:

Yes.

CB:

...or the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, but that she was much more outgoing and kind of more forceful in her personality. Is that an accurate assessment?

EP:

Yes, I think you put it well. He could be very charismatic. He could... it's because you could connect so strongly. It's not that he was a performer in a large group. He learned how to give a lecture. He learned these skills. And I can relate to that because I also am extremely introverted and withdrawn, but as a musician, I have learned how to get up in front of an audience and introduce them to what's going to happen and to speak and to tell a joke and to perform without nerves and so on. But afterwards, I will run to my car rather than have to go to the afterparty and talk to anybody. And I think he was very similar in that he learned how to do all of that, but at any party, unless it was someone he knew well, I think he was not terribly comfortable just going and saying, "Hello, Chris, how are you?" That was not his style to be effusively outgoing and friendly. He was much more, I mean, he would like to talk to you one-on-one definitely, but not in an effusive... I mean, he would immediately draw YOU out rather than him being outgoing and talking about himself. Absolutely not.

She was, yes, a forceful personality. She was a certain... it's a type. It's a German woman of a certain generation raised to be that way. I think her mother was the same way. They're raised to be confident. They're raised to have a certain presence. Again, she was not loud, she was not aggressive, but she had held a certain place and you felt it. So, she would not come in a room and take it over. But she was very beautiful, and she dressed immaculately and modern immaculately, and she would come in and begin to talk to somebody, and you would be drawn to it and you would want to hear. Now, she would ask about you to a degree, but she would talk more about, not so much herself, but about the topic at hand, whether it was the Bauhaus or whether it was the trip that they were on. And she was an excellent writer and an excellent raconteur. So, if she was speaking about what was going on, she could be very charming in telling a good story about a trip they had taken to Arizona or to Japan and charming in that way. So yes, she was the more social by far.

CB:

They seem very complimentary then, in their different energies.

EP:

Yes. Yes. I mean, she was a very good sort of partner for him in that, you know, greased the social wheels that way. Warm and effusive are not words I would use for her. I mean, not cold and aloof, but more proper. That's a word I would say.

CB:

And it seems like there was a lot of mutual respect, both in the sense of he recognized her contributions to his work.

EP:

Oh, tremendously.

CB:

But she also respected his legacy so much. And she's the reason that this house is a museum, right?

EP:

Exactly. Exactly. No, I mean they loved each other dearly. Dearly. Absolutely.

CB:

Do you recall when you were a child and you saw them together, were they affectionate with each other or was that kind of that generation and they were more reserved with each other?

EP:

Again, that generation, as my mother's written a lot about it... I mean, he was that kind of, he fell in love with her at first sight, which I personally have got a problem with that, with men.

CB:

[laughs]

EP:

Anyway, but he did! And once gone, he was gone. He was... that was it 'till the end of his life. I mean, that was it. And he adored her completely and utterly and without change or compromise from that moment until he died. And she loved him as well - dearly, dearly, dearly. And in his little tiny will, he said, "Ise, you who I have loved the most" or something, "...do with the physical things what you will and my spiritual legacy I leave to you to put in order". She took that to heart. I mean, she really felt, "This I must do". And she spent the remaining... what, he died in '69, she died in '83, so 14 years... she spent those 14 years working her tail off to do exactly that, including then leaving this house to Historic New England, which my mother and I, as is well known, thought was absurd. When we first heard it. We just laughed. We thought, not that we wanted it, it's not like, "You're taking away our inheritance!" We just thought it was laughably self-aggrandizing. We did not understand what she did, how important it was as a tool for education about the Modern movement. We didn't understand that from 1939, or 1938, people have been coming here and ringing the doorbell every single day saying, "Can we look around?" And then all the visitors coming who knew about it already coming and saying, "We've called ahead, we've got to see it." Or the other visitors were coming to stay for a week or a month or four years or whatever it was. She knew that and she knew it had to keep going. And we just thought, "That's ridiculous - this is your house. Who wants to see your house?" I mean, "How self-important are you?" And this is what we thought initially. And for many, many years on her birthday after she died, my mother and I would raise a glass of champagne and say the words every woman loves to hear, especially my grandmother: "You were right."

CB:

Do you recall when you had that change of heart about it or that your mom did?

EP:

Well, very shortly afterwards, after what was SPNEA, which became Historic New England, when they got it sort of cleaned up and people started to come, and we thought it was just going to be an absolute

disaster, and it was just going to sit here and nobody was going to come, and it was going to fall into disrepair. And Peter Gittleman, our dear friend, said, "They're flocking in! They're flocking in, and it's second behind Louisa May Alcott's house, and now it's first!" And we were like, "Seriously??" He said, "Yes!" And then we were like, "You were right". So, we did. And that's when my mother began to come here and invest herself in it and say, "Well, okay, if it's going to be something, what are you doing!?" [laughs] And, she'd start to go around and really pay attention and try to help and make a difference and make some suggestions about what should be changed and repaired and improved.

CB:

My impression is that Historic New England has been very diligent about maintaining the way that it's set up here with the decorations, which is almost all original, and to be interpreted the correct way. Is your memory of it that it looks and feels the way it did when you were a child?

EP:

Yes, very much. And I think they picked, like it is said, at about 1966, which is very much my time. I mean, I was born in '60, he died in '69, so it looks very much the way I remember it, which is quite lovely.

CB:

Yeah. Does it feel strange to be in here?

EP:

Less and less, but the first 15 or 20 times it was very strange.

CB:

What does it bring up for you just right now, looking around the room?

EP:

Well, they're all right here. I mean, it's filled with loving ghosts. I can see them all. I mean, I see her right there and right here. I see him. That was his place. He lay there and he would read to us in the evenings, and she lay here and she sat there in the mornings, and I can see us all at Christmas dinner right there. And at this time of year, I see the Christmas tree right there. It's filled overfull with memories. And this ancient, ancient record player, how we would struggle with it on Christmas Eve, trying to get it to play. And yeah.

CB:

It sounds like it brings a sense of warmth and comfort to be there.

EP:

A lot of warmth. A lot of warmth and sorrow, because I miss them so much.

CB:

Yeah. Alright, so what we were just talking about, you mentioned the Christmas tree over here - I want to show you a video. You're probably well familiar with this, maybe not, but this is on the Historic New England website and it's old home movies of the Gropius House. Have you seen this?

EP:

Well, my father took it.

CB:

Oh, okay.

EP:

All these home movies are taken by my father.

CB:

It's only two minutes. I'd just love for you to watch it and just give your thoughts, feelings, recollections of that.

EP:

All these home movies were taken by my father, and we gave them to Historic New England.

CB:

And this is 1963, I believe.

EP:

Yep. [watching video] Every year we celebrated beautiful, beautiful Christmases here. And every year the tree was decorated with completely different decorations. This time it was obviously tissue paper flowers and one year it was paper doilies. And there's me.

CB:

And how old are you there?

EP:

Well, it was '63. I was three. With my grandfather. See, he was affectionate, physically affectionate. I'm talking to him thoughtfully, and I think I'm doing this [stroking her chin thoughtfully] because he did that. And there's my sister looking around.

CB:

Do you remember these films being taken? You were pretty little.

EP:

Not at age three, but some of the older ones, like my grandfather's birthday, the later one, I remember that one being taken. Here's my mother talking, champagne glasses. Christmas dinner was always

lobster. I remember one of your questions was about what foods and drink they liked. Champagne was a favorite, and Christmas dinner was lobster which as a young child I found tedious. A lot of work. There, it's done. [video ends]

CB:

Very regionally appropriate though.

EP:

Yeah. And the Christmas procedure, so I'm sorry, can I run off on a toot about Christmas?

CB:

Yeah.

EP:

So, you also asked, may I refer to your questions?

CB:

Yes.

EP:

You asked if they were religious. Neither of them were religious at all. In fact, I think they were probably more than agnostic and bordered on atheist. But we did celebrate beautiful, beautiful Christmases here in German style - Christmas Eve in the evening, and with a big tree right here in front of the fireplace, very formal. Everybody got dressed up. We little children in velvet dresses with white tights. And the process was, we all went out for a walk. This curtain was drawn, and there was a time when it didn't go all the way across, so a big sheet was hung there, and this door was closed, and the parents and adults spent the entire day decorating the tree. But we children were not allowed to see that. And then in the late afternoon, so that you would have to come back in the dark, you went for a walk in the cold, you had to earn Christmas, and then you came back and you got changed into your finery. And at six o'clock, a little silver bell was rung, and the tree has real candles on it, a tradition, which my parents continued after my grandparents died and which I continue, real candles on it, red candles, and then all the lights are turned out and the tree is lit, which is so beautiful. You can't imagine. And I'll just say for the record that a nice, young, fresh tree is very unlikely to catch fire. Just say it for the record. We never had a problem, have never had a problem ever. 65 years of real candles on trees, never had a problem. And then we would come in and open this door, and then you see it. And what's playing on the recalcitrant, difficult, moody record player, but the "Messiah" – Handel's "Messiah". And then you stand there and you watch it in awe for a few minutes listening to the "Messiah".

And then the music is turned off and somebody reads from the Bible - the appearance of the angels to the shepherds. This was what was picked. And I believe when I was young that it was read in German from the German Bible. But as I got older, I think it was also read in English because eventually I was the one who read it. And there was some tradition that the youngest person there read it. And then there was the singing of the German Christmas carols in German and "*Stille Nacht*" and "*O Du Fröhliche*" and "*Es Ist Ein Ros Entsprungen*" and "*Ihr Kinderlein Kommet*" and I learned all these German Christmas

carols and we sang them all. And meanwhile around the tree, there are vast piles of presents waiting, waiting. And then we talk about the meaning of the light and the darkness and the turning of the year. And maybe somebody reads some poetry, and the presents sitting there, waiting, waiting. And we've listened to music and we've read the Bible and we've talked about poetry, then we sung songs, the presents are waiting and waiting, and then we go and we eat dinner... and it's lobster! Which takes four hours at least to eat. And only then do we get to come back and put on the rest of the "Messiah" and open the presents. So basically torture. If you're six or seven, it's basically torture. It's probably like two in the morning by the time you finally get to open your presents.

But there are plates. This is a sweet story about my grandfather. So, my grandmother, my mother and my father did most of the heavy lifting with the decorating of the tree and wrapping of the presents and setting out of the presents and setting everything up. But the Christmas cookies, of which there are great many fabulous German Christmas cookies and all these, my grandfather's particular job was to take those beautiful black plates, one for everybody. And because our presents were sorted into bunches, so this, there'd be beautiful cloth, but my mother's presents were all here. My presents were all here. So, everyone got a plate and it was his job. And he would do that at the white table. He'd put out the six plates and then he would get the big bags of the Christmas cookies, and he would carefully dole them all out. And whether there was any sort of Christmas cookie nibbling, maybe there was an uneven number coming out of the bags and to even them up, he had to eat a few, I don't know. But an even number appeared under the Christmas tree. So that was Christmas, which was lovely.

CB:

It sounds like there are a lot of wonderful memories wrapped around Christmas time here.

EP:

And for two people who were really not religious, in fact a bit anti-organized religion, Christmas must have been something quite lovely for them, I'm thinking, or at least for one or the other, that it was important to them to keep this tradition alive and to keep celebrating it that way.

CB:

Do you remember any particular gifts that your grandparents gave you?

EP:

They gave me dolls and toys and sweet things. I can't remember any one particular present from them. I do remember, as I mentioned before, the agony of trying to give them presents. Not that they weren't anything but delighted, particularly my grandfather, delighted and appreciative of anything that we gave them. But I remember being, feeling already quite young, the pressure of - what do you bring into this house that we could possibly contribute? So...

CB:

Well, you beat me to it. That was my question is, what does one give Walter Gropius for Christmas?

EP:

Exactly. Exactly. Well, I think it was mostly school art projects and horrible little misshapen ashtrays and things from out of clay and the usual nonsense, but...

CB:

Well, I was going to say, he probably would appreciate some homemade gifts and artwork and things like that, right?

EP:

I mean, oh, that was a given. Nothing was bought. Nothing was bought. I mean, somehow that was understood. Well, first, I mean, my sister and I had no money. I mean, we were children, but even from my mother and my father, they would make little movies. My mother would make beautiful, beautiful books with drawings and so on. But it was understood. I mean, they would buy us gifts, dolls or toys or games or clothes, beautiful scarves, things like that. But no, you didn't approach the manger with some store-bought nonsense, socks. No, no, no, no, no. [laughs] Right. I think maybe my parents may have bought a sock or scarf, but no, if you came to the Bauhaus, you came with something you made. And especially that my parents were themselves artists. I mean, it would've been embarrassing not to come with something they had made. Yeah.

CB:

Well, let's talk about that, because I know that your mother, Ati, was a professional artist. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, she illustrated children's books. Is that correct?

EP:

That was how she made her living. Right. She didn't particularly love it. She illustrated 58 books as well as some covers, out of which there probably were four that she really loved and had some fun with, and the rest were just a job. But that's how she made money, such as she made. But what she really loved was teaching. And when she was with my father, she really loved collaborating with him on his work. Before he opened his own architectural office, he worked for a well-known architect, Edward Larrabee Barnes, and did a redesign of the Pan Am interiors and ticket offices. And also, my father designed the famous Pan Am logo, and my mother worked a lot with him on graphics and the uniforms and colors. And so, they actually collaborated quite a lot, did a number of exhibitions together - sleep, and some graphics about history of writing and history of lettering and stuff. And so, I think she really enjoyed a lot of that. They were very good partners together work-wise in the years they were together. But after they separated, she mostly focused her work on illustrating and then got into teaching, which she loved and was very good at.

CB:

Where did she teach?

EP:

She taught, not throughout the year, she would give adult classes in design in sort of a mini version of the Albers course that she'd had at Black Mountain College. And so, she taught 2D design and 3D design and did paper studies. And she taught these at Dutchess Community College and here at the DeCordova Museum and in Wellfleet. And she taught for many, many years at the DeCordova and also at Dutchess and several other places. She also taught a class once at the MET in New York.

CB:

And what was her preferred medium for her artwork?

EP:

Probably she had the most fun with watercolor, which is a demanding medium because it's a slippery little sucker, literally and figuratively. You work fast and it either comes together or it doesn't, or it gets away from you. You have a good moment and then it all runs away. But she did some beautiful stuff. Landscapes were what she loved to do.

CB:

It's interesting to hear too that she continued her [father's] legacy of teaching. He was a great teacher.

EP:

Exactly. Yeah, and she was too - she was a gentle and a kind and encouraging teacher. She wasn't always a gentle, kind or encouraging person, but she was as a teacher.

CB:

And that's where I was going next, because we're talking about Walter and Ise's personalities being very different and their energy being very different. Did your mom lean towards one side or the other?

EP:

Well, she was very much her own person, but I'd say she leaned more... We who know the family well, and there are several of us, we talk about the Frank girls, because that was the last name: Ise, Hertha, Ellen, and Rena were all, Frank was the family. And then there's Ati, next generation, and then Ellen's daughter, Evi Frank. And then Rena had three girls and one boy, only one boy. [laughs] And all those Frank girls have a certain... a certain firmness to them that does come... perhaps there's a cultural element and perhaps there's a generational element, but they all can be a bit tough and have a certain edge to them. Maybe it's genetic, as I said, maybe it's cultural, maybe it's generational, having to do with the world that they grew up in and the time that they grew up in, the era that they grew up in. But my mother was incredibly creative and imaginative and had devoted friends, and she was loyal to a fault, but she could be very controlling and very, very difficult, and simultaneously very insecure and confident, and imperious. [laughs] My dear stepdad whom I loved very, very much (I was very, very lucky in my life to have three parents) said this about her, and he would say it at dinner parties right in front of her, so I feel comfortable sharing that. And when he said it, she would say, "Oh, John!" and get up and leave the table and do something in the kitchen, but it's the best description of her. He'd say, "She's very difficult, but she's worth it." And that is my mother, in a nutshell. Very difficult but worth it.

CB:

I'm thinking about being an adopted child to...

EP:

Yes...

CB:

...your grandparents. I wonder what she was like as a daughter to them. I mean, it was a tough situation for her, right?

EP:

Exactly.

CB:

And then she was adopted. She was, what, 10 years old when they...?

EP:

Yes, had just turned 10.

CB:

So, she was not far from her teenage years and...

EP:

Exactly.

CB:

Do you have a sense of how their relationship was as a family?

EP:

I do. I do. And I think it was hard. I think it was particularly hard for Ise. And of course I call them by their family nicknames, and these are family terms that I would prefer to have stay in the family. Walter and Ise are how they're known publicly. I-S-E is pronounced "EEza" with the schwa vowel in German - Ise. But inside the family, they were called Walla, instead of Walter, Walla and "eezEE" - I-S-I. But those are family terms. Ise wanted very, very much to have a baby. She wanted so much to have a baby with Walter. And it just didn't happen. It just didn't happen. So I think, and I'm totally guessing, but I think... and then there was her sister who had a baby unmarried and then dies, and then she, not has to, I mean volunteers, but adopts what is not a little baby that you can kind of, not mold, but after all, a little baby is cute and you can dress it and sort of raise it your way, but a very fully formed 10-year-old. Not really your child, your sister's child whom you've known her whole life and now is going to come, and then first to England, and then boom, boom, boom – "Well, this isn't working out and we can't get work, and, oh he's been invited by Harvard and okay, we're moving". And as I understand it, Ise threw herself into being the best provider mother that she could be. I mean, she gave her lessons in everything and writing lessons and dance lessons and French lessons, and the best school that they could find and clothes if she needed them and did the best that she could do. [pause]

But she was not by nature a demonstrative or affectionate person. That's just not the way she was made. And I think that's hard on a 10-year-old who's lost her mother. And also, as we were talking about Gropius himself, not talking about the loss of Manon, I don't think they talked much about the loss of my mother's biological mother. I think it was sort of, "Don't talk about it, and maybe she'll forget about it", which we now know is, that's not how you handle death, especially not for a child. You don't try to erase it. So, I think that... I know once I became more sort of sentient and aware that the relationship between my mother and my grandmother was never a very... they loved each other, but it was strained. It was strained... [pause] because how could it be anything else really, right? Given their characters. Both of them were strong women. Both of them were difficult women. And my mother wanted something from my grandmother that she probably couldn't give, and my grandmother wanted something from my

mother that SHE probably couldn't give. And they both did their best and made their peace and took as good care of each other as they possibly could. But I don't think that they were personalities that could mesh terribly well. Someone needed to be the soft one. The way my grandfather was the soft one, and the way my father was the soft one, and the way my stepfather was the soft one, but neither of them were the soft ones.

CB:

So, was she closer to Walter then?

EP:

Oh, yes! Much so, much so.

CB:

As you mentioned, he had a very, kind of a soft, grounded energy, it sounds to me.

EP:

Yes.

CB:

And again, very receptive, listening and being engaged.

EP:

Exactly, exactly.

CB:

Did she ever share that he was affectionate as well?

EP:

Physically or verbally?

CB:

Yeah. Well...

EP:

Even in the video that you showed me, I mean, he's chucking me under the chin, and there are pictures of my sister cuddled up to him. And I remember cuddling up to him here, and there are no pictures of me cuddled up to my grandmother. I mean, she was just not someone that you cuddled up to. She was not, I mean, and that's fine. There's some people who just don't want to be touched. That's not their comfort zone. But yes, I think he was physically affectionate. I can remember always hugging and kissing him and I've got lots of pictures of him with us clinging onto him and him with his arms around us as children and arms around her and her walking arm in arm with him in Europe and so on. So yes. Again, a generational thing. I don't know. But no, no, I've seen letters from him to her, signed, "All my love and my beloved Ati. I'm so thrilled to hear about this." So, like nowadays, I always said to both of my parents, "I love you, I love you, I miss you." I don't know if they said to each other, "I love you", face to

face. That's again, sort of a cultural and a generational thing. Like my Swiss husband's family, I say, "Do you tell each other?" "No, we never." I'm like, "Who are you saving it for?!" [laughs] You know? Like, you don't tell your own mother "I love you" - who are you saving it for? But that's, some families are that way. So, I don't know. But I would, knowing my mother, I would imagine that she told Walla that she loved him. And if she said it, I'm sure that he said it back. And I can see his handwriting, "*Alle meine Liebe*", at the bottom of letters, yes. But I don't think that happened with my grandmother. I think it was just, "*Sei umarmt*" ("be hugged"). Yeah.

CB:

So, you've mentioned your father a few times, and it sounds like he was also sort of on the softer side, like Walter would've been. Can you say a little bit more about his personality and also... let's leave it at that.

EP:

[laughs] Well, yes, I realize I'm the spitting image of my mother, but I am my father's child through and through. And although I was very close to both of my parents, I had a much easier relationship with my father. And we were very, very close. And yeah, I'm just a lot more like him than I was like my mother.

CB:

How did your parents, oh, I'm sorry...

EP:

Yeah, no, please.

CB:

How did your parents meet?

EP:

They met at Black Mountain. He was also a student there,

CB:

And he was an architect and designer. Was he also a good artist?

EP:

Yes, yes. Also a very good visual artist and photographer, particularly. So, like the two photographs of us there [gestures towards the study] are taken by him and many of the photographs. In fact, Peter was saying just the other day that many of the photographs that they have in their collection of my grandfather, now that they finally uploaded photos from a big album I have of his photographs, he said, "I've just realized that they're all your father's photographs." So, photography was a big interest of his and furniture making and an ultralight pilot. And he was also similar to my grandfather in that he was constantly curious about things and learning and quiet and introverted and never one to talk about himself, but did name his architectural practice after himself. [laughs] But there were only two people in it. So, there you go.

CB:

So, a very creative family, all around.

EP:

Yeah. Yeah.

CB:

And when did your parents separate? How old were you?

EP:

I was six, I think. Yeah. But they'd been together quite a while because they married in '47 and then separated in '66 or '67, I'm not even quite sure. But so, it was almost 20 years or 19 years.

CB:

And then when did your mother marry your stepfather?

EP:

So, they got together in about '70.

CB:

So, you were about 10.

EP:

But in this whole marriage thing, they were very Bohemian, so... [laughs] I think my parents only got officially divorced when I was like 17, so '77. And then, although she and my stepdad had been together seven years at that point, but then, so my father also was together with somebody that they didn't... no one bothered much about marriage or whatever. But then eventually my mother and stepfather got married and my father and person he was with got married. But that was all for tax reasons and things like that. Nobody really cared about labels.

CB:

And what was your stepfather's name?

EP:

John Johansen. He was one of the Harvard Five. As he would say with a laugh at the table, "I'm a name architect."

CB:

Did he study under Gropius?

EP:

And he also studied under Gropius, yeah.

CB:

At the Graduate School of Design?

EP:

Exactly. And he remembers meeting my mother here because there would be parties here. When Walter was teaching at the Graduate School of Design, every year in the spring, he would hold a party for the graduates here. And John was at one of those parties as a graduate, and he remembers, he was 10 years older than my mother. That's what I said [laughs], there's sort of a family trait, not as much a difference as... I think there was 16 years between my grandfather and grandmother, and my father was seven years older than my mother, and John was 10 years older, so I think John was 25 when he came to the party as a graduate. Because he says he remembers this very sullen 15-year-old kind of skulking around the corners and sort of being forced to bring out like a tray of [laughs], you know, some sort of hors d'oeuvres, slammed it down on some side table and then disappeared. And she doesn't remember him at all. And it's not like he thought she was attractive or anything, just remembers this. And then decades later they crossed paths again in New York and became a couple.

CB:

You mentioned your mother and your father, Charles Forberg, being collaborative with each other in their...

EP:

Yes.

CB:

...at least at times.

EP:

Yeah.

CB:

Was that the case with your stepfather?

EP:

Not at all. [laughs] Not even remotely, no. He had a very different... John was very individual. His style of designing and working was much more, not "Starchitect", but... [pause] yeah, he worked alone. He imagined alone. He had a much more sort of... a different brain that worked differently. Yeah. So no, their connection was a different kind of connection.

CB:

Did your father and stepfather... do you sense a Gropius influence in their architectural work?

EP:

Yes, definitely. More strongly probably in my father's case. I would say that his style was very classical in the modern tradition. And that John's style, I mean, my grandfather knew both of their work well and

was very admiring of it. Not that John's wasn't modern - it was more organic, more playful. I mean, it's well known. My father's was just very, very classic and very balanced and cool and calm. And John's was, I mean, he had bathtubs for six people in the living room in our house. You're supposed to come over and disrobe and get in the grotto and have a bath [laughs] before you had dinner and things like that. And bridges running throughout the house from bedroom to bedroom, open bridges. And so, it was a little more... perhaps a little more wildly creative and a little more organic, plant-like. Yeah, just so you can see they were different minds going in different directions. Different sensibilities.

CB:

Going back to your mother and her artistic work, and going back to the idea of collaboration as well, what did she contribute to the design of the house? Did she have ideas?

EP:

Yes. Yes, she did. And what's so lovely is that my grandfather asked her, I mean, she was 12 or not even 11 or something. It's always hard because her birthday is in December, so she was born in '25, but in December, so you're always off by a year. So, it's hard for me to figure out always what age she was, but he asked her what she would like in her bedroom and in the house, and better than that, he listened to her and he made adjustments in the house based on what she said. What she wanted, as she described it to me, she said to him she wanted a floor of sand and an open ceiling with a sky of stars, and he couldn't quite pull that off, but it was very much because of her wishes that he did the upstairs deck so that she could get out and have, and that it was not all covered, all roofed, but open so that she COULD see the stars. And then when she complained that the sill was too high for the window, he lowered it for her in that room so that she could see out better. And you know, of course, about the outside staircase that was put in for her so that she would not have to go through the house and see all these adults and deal with all the adult chatter. And boy did I wish I'd had that a couple of times [laughs] in our house. But yeah, so that's what she wanted was a floor of sand and a sky of stars.

CB:

And it's notable too, having spent many hours in this house, that the color palettes in her room are different. Did she choose those?

EP:

I believe so.

CB:

It's like an orange/brown. It's more earthy tones

EP:

That might have changed since she moved on. I can't vouch for that, but Peter [Gittleman] might know.

CB:

Certainly some of her artwork is up on the walls there.

EP:

Yeah.

CB:

What do you feel when you go into her old room?

EP:

Not what you would think, because I do believe it changed quite a lot after she left. I used to sleep in her bed and my memories are of HATING those masks up along the wall. They scared the crap out of me as a little girl.

CB:

You mean the illustration that runs along by the bed?

EP:

Yeah, along the big bed there. But I have other memories. So, as I said, I think a lot changed in that room after she moved out, because she moved out when she was 16. She went to Black Mountain and didn't come back, would not come back, to finish her final year at Concord Academy. Tested out, smart girl. So they used it for many, many other things since then. They may well have repainted it even since then. So, I am not sure how much of it... I have vivid memories of my sister and I being in that room and then so many other people being in there. So I'm not sure, even as the house is set to 1966, that I think that room is more '66 than it is her room.

CB:

So, she actually only lived here about four years, it sounds like, right?

EP:

Yeah, right. That it was really HER room.

CB:

Right. So, when you would come to visit when you were a child and she was no longer living here, was that room just a guest room?

EP:

Yeah. Yeah. It was more the family guest room. But it's funny, we would often...no, why was that? [pause] My mother and I would often stay in the guest room. When we were little, well, obviously my parents would stay in the guest room. My sister and I would stay in my mother's room, and then later my mother and I would stay in the guest room. I dunno.

CB:

And it's a really big room, it always strikes me, and it feels to me, maybe you can confirm if this is true, that when Walter designed the house, he really wanted to make her feel at home knowing that she had been uprooted from Germany to England and then from England to the States and been adopted, that he wanted to give her a lot of space and then again, take her ideas into serious account in designing it.

EP:

Yeah, no, it is. I mean, it's much larger than the guest room and larger than their bedroom. It's a beautiful room. I mean, light on two sides.

CB:

And he even, I think at her request, put his old desk in there from the Bauhaus. Right?

EP:

I'm not sure it was at her request. I mean, where else would they have put it, really?

CB:

Ah, okay. So, you mentioned Black Mountain College and she went there when she was 16. Is that what you said?

EP:

Yes. She went there for a summer program and also just, I think she was being a recalcitrant teenager and wasn't going to work, or they were looking for something to do with her that summer. And he had a close connection to Black Mountain, of course, knew [Josef] Albers well, and so sent her down there for the summer program and she absolutely loved it, fell completely in love with the place and with the whole experience of this commune of students and professors and what they were doing, and literally would not come back to Concord Academy and leave this wonderful new family that she'd found. And amazingly enough, was able to test out of her senior year at Concord Academy and stay there. Well, of course, Black Mountain wasn't even an accredited college, so it didn't matter so much, I guess. And then she stayed there for four years and then was able to test out of... where did they get their degrees? University of North Carolina or something, right? I think so, yeah. But they weren't accredited [so] that they couldn't award a college degree, but then they had some arrangement with, I think it was University of North Carolina or Raleigh or something... someplace they went and had something where they could kind of transfer her credits. And then, so her actual college degree is from... I mean, everyone says they went to Black Mountain College, but they weren't accredited, so her diploma is from someplace else.

CB:

Well, she certainly made a professional living based on the education.

EP:

Yes, well exactly. Like everyone else who went there, all of them had the same thing.

CB:

Is your sense that Black Mountain College had a similar, let's say vibe, for lack of a better word, as the Bauhaus?

EP:

Yes. Well, very much so. And there were so many people there from the Bauhaus, teachers, and it was a mini Bauhaus and that whole feeling of the students and the teachers working together collaboratively

to keep this thing afloat and to have parties and create something new and magical and meaningful and important together. Absolutely. And I think that she felt that and loved that and felt that vitality and that importance and that genuine... this is meaningful, this is real. And I think it also resonated for her that she'd heard these stories about the Bauhaus for the last six years or whatever, and now she had found something where this was actually happening in real time and she could be a part of it. And she made very, very close friends with the [Theodore] Dreiers, lifelong friends with the Dreier family who were major players at Black Mountain College and with the Albers too, of course, and many, many, MANY other people. And then found her first husband there, and it was a huge, huge part of her life.

CB:

Now, we've also mentioned your sister a few times. What was her name and what was she like?

EP:

Her name was Sarina, spelled S-A-R-I-N-A. So, it comes from the Russian meaning princess, like Czar and Czarina. Yeah, she was lovely to me and she was a lovely person. Also troubled, but very, very special to me. It is sort of an interesting story how she was adopted, because I think another of your questions was, how many of the Bauhausers did I know personally, and really the one that I knew the best, I met many of them of course over time, but the one that I knew very, very well was Lajko [Marcel] Breuer and his family, Connie Breuer and his two children, Cesca and Tamas, not only because they lived right down there, but because they lived in Wellfleet where we also spent the entire summer. And Cesca babysat me and we were over there all the time. And Lajko taught me how to play chess when I was a child and never, ever let me win. Taught me how to play by losing over and over and over again [laughs], but knew them very, very well.

And they had their first child, Tamas - Tom. And my mother was very close friends with Connie, his wife, and then [they] were not able to have another child and very much wanted to have another child. And then they arranged to adopt a little girl from Germany. And my mother was traveling in Germany at the time, and I mean, this is 1956 I think it was. And at that time, you're talking about snail mail and you get a little photograph about that big and after three weeks you get a letter and so Connie had asked my mother if she would be willing to make a detour on her trip and go to the orphanage where this little girl was, and basically sort of check her out that she was genuinely as healthy as Connie had been told in the letters and so forth. And my mother did and met this little girl whom the Breuers did adopt, a little three-year-old girl named Cesca.

And the head of the orphanage, a very nice orphanage run by nuns, and the head of the orphanage, a very nice man, was no fool, of course, and he sees this bilingual but American woman come in and these poor orphanages full of these children that desperately needed homes. And he said to her, "We have another little girl who really, really needs a home and in her first year as a baby, came here as a baby and failure", what we'd say nowadays, "failure to thrive, even though all the other babies, we were feeding her, but she just wasn't doing well, and so we had to give her to one of our foster mothers in the village, a lovely older woman who is the church organist, but now she's in her seventies and she's just getting too old to do this. And so, she's had her now, and the little girl is almost three, but she just can't keep her much longer because she's just getting too old for this. And this little girl really, really, really needs a home." And of course, that was my sister, and that's how my parents ended up adopting my sister. And of course, it took some four months or something to get all the paperwork sorted out, but that's how they found my sister. So, she was also adopted from Germany, and she and Cesca ended up becoming good friends.

But my sister, as we now have learned, the first three years are very, very formative. And I think, and my father thought too, that unlike the other children, well for all of the children, any child upheaval is terribly hard. But my sister wasn't in the orphanage with lots of other children and lots of other nuns taking care of lots of children. She was in a home with one "mother", quote/unquote. And then another woman came and took her away from that home and took her away from her little village and took her away from her country and took her away from her language and all of that when she was three years old. And perhaps she'd already had some difficulties, the fact that she just wasn't doing very well, even in her first year of life. So, I think she had it rough in the very beginning, and she had it rough after that.

She was very smart and talented in a lot of things, but she struggled in school and she struggled with what may have been bipolar disorder. Nobody ever diagnosed her, it was before all of that. She could be really angry with people, never with me, and then be really depressed and sometimes be really up. So, seems it's an armchair diagnosis. And then boom, she was gone, killed in a car accident at age 20, which just seems as it is with any young person killed, like just such a waste but also such a cheat that she never had a chance to get help, get a chance to get balanced out, to have a chance to experience a career if that's what she wanted to experience, getting some help with whatever problem she was experiencing, to have a chance to have a partner in life, if that's what she wanted, or have children, if that's what she wanted.

She was always, which was, I thought so remarkable... both my parents had struggles with her, but much more so my mother because after all, my poor sister had sort of had a mother. So, I think that she had more probably resentment towards my mother. She'd never had a father, so she probably found it easier to connect to my father or maybe wanted a father more. And as I've mentioned, my father was a much gentler, a calmer person, and easier to get along with just in general so he had less difficulties with her, but with me, she was never anything other than completely loving and devoted, which seems a little bit perhaps out of character. But when you think about it, many people who've been wounded as children try to heal themselves by healing the next, either their own children or the next young thing that comes along.

But also, you might think that my being born, I mean, I was unexpected, so my parents didn't think they could have children, which is why they adopted. And then all of a sudden, my mother gets pregnant three years later, and you would think my sister would be jealous. Here comes along a biological baby. She could have been vicious to me. I would've understood that. And instead she just adored me. She absolutely adored me. I was her baby. And there's one story about when I was quite little, like two or something. So, she was five years older than me. She would have been seven. And we were at dinner, but I was walking, so I must've been two. And I guess my parents were still eating and I toddled off into the kitchen and my sister followed me, and I reached up for a pan that was on the stove, and it was my sister who'd followed me in to make sure I was safe, not either of my parents, it was my sister who stopped and caught that and made sure that I didn't pull the pan down. And my parents, both of them told me that story.

But what I remember is as a tween, I was 12, 12 and 13, for two years, and I was at the age where the last person... so my parents were long since separated, and I'm living with my mom mostly, but I saw my dad all the time on the weekends and so on and so forth. But the last place I wanted to be on the weekend was home with my mother, you know, because I was 12. Oh my God... spend time with my mother, nooooo, you know? And every single weekend that I wasn't with my father, if it was a weekend to be with my mother, but we were very casual about it (there was no custody or anything), but if my father was away or traveling or work or something, my sister would invite me. My sister would

immediately say, "Come spend the weekend with me". Now, she had a steady boyfriend, and I would of course say, "I want to come spend the weekend with you". And she'd say, "Come on, spend the whole weekend with me". Now, she was 17 with a steady boyfriend, 17 years old, madly in love with a boyfriend, having sex, and inviting your 12-year-old kid sister to spend the weekend with you. Once, sure. Every other weekend or every third weekend, and then maybe two weekends in a row for two years until they broke up or something like that.

When I look back on it, I'm stunned. I'm absolutely stunned. And she couldn't have been anything less than adoring to me the whole weekend. I did everything with them, never a minute alone, never. They want to go to a movie - I went with them to the movie. Go for a walk - I went on the walk. I spent, I must have driven her poor dear boyfriend, whom I also adored, absolutely nuts. Absolutely nuts. I mean, we were like a little family, but they never got a minute alone. She was so dear to me. So, whatever struggles she had, she spared me any of them. I was like both her little sister, but I was like her baby. And she maybe healed herself a little bit by giving me all the love that... [pause] I don't know, maybe she didn't get or needed to get or whatever. But in many ways, I've had some therapists ask me when I've told them about my mother, "Why aren't you a serial killer?" And I've said, "Well, my sister". [laughs] CUT! [laughs]

CB:

It sounds like a wonderful relationship.

EP:

It was, it was. And in many ways, I mean, of course I was shattered when she died.

CB:

And how old were you then?

EP:

I had just turned 15 when she actually died. I mean, she had her accident right before Christmas, and then she died, oddly enough on exactly the same day that my mother's mother died.

CB:

Really?

EP:

Yeah. Weird coincidence, right? January 3rd and shortly after I turned 15. So, I was 14, almost 15.

CB:

I'm sorry. So, she died the same day that Ise died?

EP:

Not Ise, Hertha.

CB:

Oh, her birth mother.

EP:

Her birth mother, yeah.

CB:

Okay.

EP:

Yeah. And then, I mean, of course it was shattering for a very long time, but then eventually life goes on. I went to college, I went to graduate school, I got a job, I got married, I had kids, and it sort of heals over. I mean, you get accustomed to it that this person is gone. But now that my parents are gone, and I don't mean to say I'm all alone - I have a fabulous husband and two wonderful kids and great friends. But in terms of my *Urfamilie*, my original, I'm all alone. And boy, do I miss her. I mean, again, I miss her now almost as sharply as when she first died. Because as I look around here at all these ghosts, she's sitting right there and you showed me that video and I'm swallowing back the tears because she should be here. [chokes up] See, you did it. [laughs] I held out until what, quarter of eight? I did pretty good.

CB:

I'm wondering about your mother being adopted herself, if she, maybe a part of her wanted to offer...

EP:

I think so.

CB:

...offer maybe what she felt like she didn't get, or, I dunno.

EP:

Yes. Yeah.

CB:

You think there's probably something there?

EP:

Well, I don't think it's a coincidence at all that these two women... Ise adopting and doing the best she could and it not being an easy relationship. And then Ati trying to sort of fix that by adopting [laughs] and doing the best she could and it also not really working. Interestingly enough, I didn't have the easiest time conceiving, and I remember my first husband saying, "Well, we could adopt". And I was like, "NO!" [laughs] I said, "If we can't have children, we're going to get a lot of cats! So many cats like you can't even believe it. And I know there are needy children out there, and I know they deserve a good home, but trust me, it wouldn't work out". [laughs]

CB:

Now speaking of this tragic car accident, I know that Ise herself was in one. And can you talk about that a little?

EP:

And this and my dad, and this is the other thread through our family, is car accident. Car accident. Car accident.

CB:

So, what happened to Ise?

EP:

I need a self-driving car, except I hate [Elon] Musk, so I won't do it, but I do. Yes. Car accidents... not a good thread. Which one do you want to hear about? How much Kleenex? [laughs] One in each hand.

CB:

So, I'm wondering about the car accident that Ise had.

EP:

Yes.

CB:

When did that occur?

EP:

So, my parents married in '47. My mother proposed to my father because he got an Appleton scholarship to travel in Europe for, I believe, almost a year. And so, she proposed to him [laughs] so they could go together. They were going to get married anyway. And they came back from that and almost immediately thereafter, my poor grandmother got into this awful car accident. So, I believe it was early '48, but we can look that up. But I believe it was early '48. And nobody knows exactly what happened because my grandmother blacked out. I mean, she has no memory of the actual accident, but she used to have a seamstress come and do some work for them, an old elderly woman. And she was driving her home, I believe it was winter, and it might even have been here on Baker Bridge Road. It was not far away at all. And she drove off the road, hit a tree, and she herself was very badly hurt. Her foot was nearly severed. She had a very bad concussion - face, lacerations, her hand very severely hurt. And the seamstress was killed. And she was in a cast, a full leg cast for six months, and her hand quite severely damaged. And my parents had to move in for six months so that my mother could be the housekeeper and helper, full-time helper, and cook and all of that. But again, I remember asking my mother about this and my mother saying, "No talk about it". I mean, again, whether my grandmother spoke privately to my grandfather about what happened and any feelings she might've had about having caused the death of this poor woman, which I'm sure, I have no doubt she felt awful about, but she certainly did not discuss it with my mother or my father. It was never talked about at any time, even within the immediate family, just not... that was the approach was, don't mention it.

CB:

You mentioned severe injuries. Did she have lingering effects from that later in life?

EP:

Yes, absolutely. I mean, she could walk short distances without a cane, but she mostly had a cane with her for the rest of her life.

CB:

Really? Since the late 1940s?

EP:

Yeah.

CB:

Wow.

EP:

Yeah. And that one hand, it's awful that I can't remember now if it was the right or the left, I feel like it was her right. That thumb was always, the way it sat in her hand was always a little bit funny. And she had a scar on her face. By the time I remember her, you couldn't see it anymore. It did fade. Faces heal quite well for scars, so she healed otherwise. But the foot, I mean, it's a miracle that they saved that ankle, apparently. It was almost completely detached.

CB:

Especially in that era of medicine...

EP:

I know.

CB:

...at the time.

EP:

I know, right. So, it was very significant.

CB:

What's your recollection of when Walter and Ise passed away?

EP:

Yeah, I do remember both quite well. My grandfather died, of course, in 1969, July 5th. And it's been written about, it's well documented. What I remember about it, which is sort of sad, it was summer and my mother was here, of course, supporting him and supporting my grandmother and because it was summer, we always spent the entire summer on Cape Cod and my father was down in New York. And

because [Gropius] had been ill, he'd had an infection, and then they decided to do this operation to put in a heart valve, and we were on the Cape. And so, I remember I didn't go all the way back to New York to be with my father. My mother had me stay with some friends right there on the Cape so that she could just come here and to Boston to be with my grandparents. And then after he died, the friends that I was staying with didn't tell me, but I remember she came to pick me up and she brought a newspaper. And when she picked me up, she showed me the newspaper and the newspaper said, "Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, dead at 86." And that's sort of... it shocked me. And I thought, I mean, even at the time I was nine, I remember that, and I was shocked and hurt. I mean, of course I was upset, but even as a 9-year-old, I thought, what a strange way to tell your daughter that her grandfather has died.

CB:

It was too painful for her to verbalize it?

EP:

I don't know. I don't know. Maybe she wanted... but I knew he was a famous person. I mean, I had been with him on several occasions when there were people around, and I knew that I didn't need to see that, but yeah.

CB:

And did he pass away at the hospital?

EP:

Yeah. Yeah.

CB:

How about Ise? I know that was a number of years later in 1983.

EP:

Yes. And she began to have these very small TIAs, transient ischemic attacks, and so she faded much more gradually. And then eventually we got a hospital bed here for her, and she was here for quite some time. And then finally moved her to, I guess, basically a nursing home, [a] very nice nursing home. But I remember we did go to see her there and she was pretty well out of it. But it was, my grandfather's birthday is in May, of course, May 18th and in May, lily of the valley blooms, and it would bloom right down there [gestures outside] beyond the pine tree. And for his birthday, we would always cut it and collect *Maiglöckchen*, they're called in German, and they have a lovely smell, as you probably know, and he loved them, and we all loved them. And we went to visit her in May. She died June 9th, I believe. And I remember we drove up from New York and went to visit her in May. It was the last time that I saw her. I believe my mother saw her after that. We picked, because it was around my grandfather's birthday, we picked some *Maiglöckchen* and brought them into her very nice room in this very nice sort of nursing home place. And even though she was not completely gone, but not, certainly not with it, and talking so on and so forth. And we brought the flowers in and my mother held them up to her nose, and she said in German, because even though her English was excellent but as you fade, you kind of revert. And she said, "*Wunderbar*", which means "wonderful". And that was the last thing I heard her say and I thought that was lovely, that it was the last thing I heard her say, and also her last statement, but also that we could make her happy that last time. And my mother told her and said, "Walla's birthday was two days

ago, and we picked these from the house" or something, and I don't know how much of that she absorbed, but yeah. And yeah, it was a little while later that she just quietly slipped away, as they say.

CB:

And Walter was 86. How old was she?

EP:

She was also 86.

CB:

Oh, really?

EP:

Which we thought was a nice match.

CB:

So, it sounds like her death was a little more expected given her health, whereas Walter...

EP:

Very much so. Yeah, we were just kind of waiting for it.

CB:

It sounds like his was somewhat, I mean, he was elderly, but somewhat unexpected, right?

EP:

Yeah, we'd really hoped... I mean, he'd had this infection, I don't remember if it was staph or pneumonia, but this infection, which sadly he hadn't treated. Ise had urged him to go to the doctor. He thought he just had a cold and it turned out it had gotten into his heart valve. And so, by the time they treated it, it had damaged his heart valve, and then they told him, well, either we can replace the heart valve or we cannot, but then you're going to really be an invalid, you're going to have to because it's not working right. And you're going to be prone to heart attacks, and you can't do very much, and you have to stay home and stay in bed. And at first, when he was kind of drugged up, he said, "Well, I don't want the operation". And then when his head cleared, he said, "Yeah, of course, I mean, I'm not going to do that, and we'll have the operation and get the heart valve". And they did the operation. And the operation initially was a success, but then for some reason it just didn't take and it didn't work right. It didn't. And then his lungs filled up with water and about a week later, he just died.

CB:

And how old was your mother when she passed away?

EP:

88.

CB:

And that was in 2014, if I'm not mistaken?

EP:

Yeah.

CB:

And what were the circumstances there?

EP:

She got just the death she wanted. [laughs] She had a brain tumor, but it left her clear as a bell right to the end. It did not rob her of her brain in any way. And it gave her very little pain up until the very end, at which point she did get morphine in the last week. And even up until the day before her death, she was still clear and could speak to me on the phone and she got to organize. She was EXTREMELY organized, and as I've said, rather controlling and liked to have control over every aspect of her life. And so, she got to go through all of her papers and all of her things and put everything in order just like she liked, and she knew the end was coming, and she knew when it was going to come.

And I'll never forget going and visiting her once and she was going through her address book and making calls, and she always will clear her throat before she answers. [clears through] "Hello, Julia? Yes. Hello, dear. Yes. It's Ati. Yes. Yes, yes, dear. Well, I'm calling to let you know that I'm dying." No joke. No joke. She'd call up old friends and, "Carol, dear, how are you? It's Ati. Yes. Yes. I'm calling to the Cape. Yes. Well, I'm calling to let you know... can you hear me? I'm calling to let you know I have a brain tumor. I'm dying." [laughs] Verbatim. Verbatim. And she loved it, she called everyone up, told them. And I said, "What are you doing!?" And she said, "Well, I'm letting them know, if they want to come and visit me", which many of them did, came and made their farewell visits, and so she had exactly the death she wanted. And then I asked her, "Are you sad? Are you worried? Are you scared?" And about a month before she died, she said, "No, not at all. I'm ready for the next adventure. I'm ready to go and it's all good." And that was a great relief to me to hear.

CB:

I can imagine.

EP:

Yeah.

CB:

Sounds like a very strong lady.

EP:

Oh, she was. She was that.

CB:

So, as we wind down here, I'm curious what it's like to be related to such a globally-renowned figure.

EP:

[laughs]

CB:

I mean, to you, he's just your grandfather. Does it seem surreal to have that level of fame attached to him?

EP:

It does. And I've had 65 years to get used to it, but it is still surreal. And recently, just about a month ago, a little more than a month ago, I went to Berlin for a pre-opening of the new Bauhaus building where, quite to my astonishment, yet again, I was treated like a princess for no good reason, but just because I am the *Enkelin*, the granddaughter. And again, I did nothing but get born. I did nothing but get born. But sadly, as more and more people die and fewer and fewer people are left who can say that they knew him as an individual and as a person, I guess I have that tiny piece to offer. And I guess that tiny piece becomes more and more important. As I was saying, I'm the last little ant at the end of the row, and so unimportant but I guess that little piece becomes of some small value.

But yes, it is very surreal. And when people say, I mean, I'm so used to it in this country that nobody, so few people know the Bauhaus nowadays or know it, that once in a while someone says, "Oh, I studied architecture" or something. And I usually say nothing. But if someone says, "Oh, I'm just fascinated by Walter Gropius", then I sort of feel compelled. I'll usually say, "Really? Are you studying?" And then I'll say, "Well, I know a little bit about Walter Gropius" [laughs] and then finally, and then usually they're like, "Oh my God!" And then I say, "No, it's nothing!" Then I sometimes think, well, I would feel that way if I met Igor Stravinsky's granddaughter, or something similar.

But then I have to remember everybody, not everybody, but people have progeny. And the progeny are, you know, Ben Franklin has progeny. I mean, Thomas Jefferson has progeny, and they're just people. And I'm just one of a million. I'm just a person. There's absolutely nothing special about me at all. So, to answer your question - yes, it's surreal. Part of me is kind of used to it. Part of me, not at all. Like when I went to Berlin and I'm walking with my friend Annamarie who's the director of the Bauhaus and I hear people say, "*Die Enkelin, die Enkelin kommt!*" ["The granddaughter, the granddaughter is coming"] "Oh, oh..." [laughs] It just feels totally bizarre. But I would like to, which is why I came to do this, to offer that one little piece, which is to say, this man was truly something remarkable, special, lovely, and wonderful as a human being. And his extraordinary accomplishments as an architect and a visionary and a teacher are equally memorable and important. Equally. And that's all I have to offer.

CB:

Well, I think unless you have anything else to say, I think it's perfect place to end it.

EP:

Good.

CB:

Excellent. Well, thank you, Erika.